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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000246

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TAGS: PGOV PREL IT

SUBJECT: ITALY: PD LEADER VELTRONI SEES NO FOREIGN POLICY
DISAGREEMENTS WITH U.S. IF HE WINS ELECTIONS

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Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C/NF) Democratic Party (PD) PM candidate Walter Veltroni told the Ambassador February 26 he did not think the U.S. would have foreign policy disagreements with his government should he win April 13-14 parliamentary elections. Free from the constraints of the far left, Veltroni said his government could more warmly embrace the Trans Atlantic relationship; do more militarily in Afghanistan; be tougher on Iran; have closer relations with Israel; and seek greater energy independence from Russia. Veltroni was optimistic about his chances for victory, though he did not rule out an eventual agreement with former PM Silvio Berlusconi after the elections. End Summary.

VELTRONI OPTIMISTIC ABOUT VICTORY

¶2. (C/NF) The Ambassador hosted Democratic Party (PD) Secretary and PM candidate Walter Veltroni for lunch February

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¶26. A relaxed and optimistic Veltroni styled himself as a new brand of politician who is bridging the generational divide between Italy's aging political class and its disenfranchised youth. Veltroni said PD internal polls place him at most six percentage points behind People of Liberty (PdL) candidate Silvio Berlusconi and noted that he is gaining a few points weekly. Veltroni conceded Italy's complex electoral laws might force some sort of bipartisan political arrangement between himself and Berlusconi, but he did not envision any formal agreement on anything beyond limited institutional and electoral reforms.

VELTRONI SEES NO FOREIGN POLICY DISAGREEMENTS

¶3. (C/NF) Veltroni told the Ambassador that he did not think the U.S. would have foreign policy disagreements with his government should he win April 13-14 parliamentary elections. Veltroni emphasized that his decision not to run in a coalition with the far left would enable his government to talk openly about the importance of the Trans Atlantic relationship for Italy.

¶4. (C/NF) Iran: The Ambassador told Veltroni the U.S had a mostly good relationship with current PM Prodi but said Italy's Iran policy was the single most difficult issue. Citing a September 2007 Veltroni op-ed calling for a containment of Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Ambassador made the case for economic sanctions and criticized the Prodi government for its frequent high level meetings with Iranian leaders. Veltroni stated that Iran represents a ""clear threat,"" said continued sanctions are vital and agreed high level meetings with Iranian officials weakens and undermines the international community's message.

¶5. (C/NF) Afghanistan: Veltroni acknowledged the problems NATO is facing in Afghanistan and said Italy can and will do more there.

¶6. (C/NF) MEPP: Veltroni was harshly critical of D'Alema's treatment of Israel, specifically saying that ""you cannot do business with terrorist organizations"" like Hamas and Hezbollah.

¶7. (C/NF) Cuba: The Ambassador showed Veltroni the statement D'Alema issued congratulating Raul Castro on his assumption of power in Cuba. Veltroni appeared embarrassed and said that D'Alema's ideological background often shows through in his statements.

¶8. (C/NF) Energy Security: The Ambassador told Veltroni that Italy needs to worry about its energy security and is becoming overly dependent on Russia for its energy needs. Veltroni agreed that Italy must limit its energy dependence on Russia and that Italy needs to develop a midterm solution (4 -7 years) including the construction of re-gasification plants and other infrastructure. Veltroni lamented that environmental permits and overlapping bureaucracies slow down project development and said he hopes to streamline the process.

COMMENT

¶9. (C/NF) The U.S relationship with the Prodi government has

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been good despite some significant differences on a few issues. Veltroni outlined a relationship that would clearly be better if he is indeed able to govern free from the influence of the far left. End Comment.

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